

An Unknown Female Martyr from Jerusalem

[Una mártir desconocida de Jerusalén]

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Resumen: In the present article we edit the fragment of a text related to an unnamed female new martyr from Jerusalem from the time of John XIII. The text sheds light on an unknown period in the History of the Coptic Church.

Abstract: En este artículo editamos el fragmento de un texto relativo a una nueva mártir de Jerusalén no identificada de la época de Juan XIII. El texto muestra un periodo desconocido en la Historia de la Iglesia Copta.

Palabras clave: Nuevos mártires coptos. Textos árabes cristianos. Historia medieval.

Key words: Coptic New Martyrs. Christian Arabic text. Medieval History.



Introduction

‘New martyrs’¹ are relatively few in the Coptic calendar. We can mention among them Jirjis al-Muzahim,² Michael,³ and others included in the

¹ The New Martyrs are those who suffered under Muslim rule, cf. De Lacy O’LEARY, *The Saints of Egypt in the Coptic Calendar*, Amsterdam: Philo Press 1974, p. 21.

² Emile Maher ISHAQ, “Jirjis al-Muzahim, Saint”, in *CE*, IV, pp. 1335-1336. Subhi Y. LABIB, “Bulus al-Habis, Saint”, *CR*, II, pp. 424-425.

biography of Matthew the Great,⁴ Barsanuphius (13 Kiahk), John Phanijoit, Menas of al-Ashmunayn, Menas the Ascetic (17 Amshir), Michael of Damietta who was a "new martyr" in the period 1167-1200, Salib (feast day: 3 Kiahk), Sidhom Bishay (17 Baramhāt), and Simeon (feast day: 14 Kiahk).⁵

1. The manuscript

The manuscript 9 Bible in the Coptic Museum⁶ contains two folios relating to a new, unnamed female martyr:

(Bibl. 9). - 214 feuillets. 20,5 X 14: 17,5 X 11 cm, 15 lignes. Le manuscrit original a été décousu et mal relié. I comprend les feuillets 25-157; II comprend les feuillets 3-24; III, les feuillets 158-197, c'est la suite de I. En outre, deux feuillets d'un autre manuscrit, de format 20 X 14, 16 X 10 cm, ont été ajoutés, Le texte est vocalisé en partie. XVIIIe siècle.

³ Youhanna Nessim YOUSSEF, "Michael, a new martyr according to a fragment from Saint Macarius Monastery" *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 46 (2007), pp. 151-158.

⁴ The list was published. See, for example, MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, arabe 145, ff. 137v-141r; Kamel NAKHLAH, *Silsilat Ta'rīkh al-Baṭārikah: Maktabat Dayr al-Suryān*, Cairo 2001 (2nd ed.), III, pp. 44-46. The list is also found in the patriarchal history attributed to Yusab, cf. Samuel AL-SURIANI and Nabih Kamel DAOUD (eds.), *Ta'rīkh al-Ābā' al-Baṭārikah li-l-Anbā Yūsāb, Usqūf Fuwah*, Cairo 1984, pp. 200-202. M. N. SWANSON, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt*, Cairo – New York: The American University Press in Cairo 2010, pp. 133-134.

⁵ A. S. ATIYA, "Martyrs, Coptic", *CE*, V, pp. 1550-1559.

⁶ G. GRAF, *Catalogue de manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire*, «Studi e testi 63», Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1937, p. 4, number 9. M. SIMAIKA, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the Principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt*, Cairo: Publications of the Coptic Museum, 1939, p. 23, number 39.

2. The Historical background

The martyrdom of this new unnamed female saint took place in the year 1491 during the reign of al-Ashraf Sayf al-Dīn Qayt Bāy (Jan. 1468- Aug. 1496) and during the patriarchate of John XIII.⁷

Many significant events took place during this era. The monasteries of the Red Sea were attacked and fell into ruins around the year 1506 AD.⁸ Patriarch John XIII, all too aware of, “the great destruction, ruin and want in every place,”⁹ had written a letter to his fellow brother the Patriarch of Syria and Antioch, Ignatius Nūḥ (1494-1509 AD) describing the events.¹⁰

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, many monks from Lebanon and the Levant arrived and settled at the Syrian Monastery in Wādī Naṭrūn.¹¹ John XIII faced instability within the church also whereby many Coptic elites had adopted some Islamic customs, such as polygamy, to which the patriarch reacted by issuing several decrees and letters of objection.¹²

During this time, there was a significant presence of Copts dwelling in Jerusalem; such as the Coptic elite named Sarkis who composed the *psalis* of the Three Young Men (in the fiery furnace) and an explanation of the *Theotokia*.¹³

⁷ Subhi Y. LABIB, “John XIII”, CE, IV, pp. 1346-1347.

⁸ M. N. SWANSON, *The Coptic Papacy*, p. 125.

⁹ M. N. SWANSON, *The Coptic Papacy*, p. 127.

¹⁰ Iskandar BCHEIRY, “Lettera del patriarca copto Yuhanna XIII al patriarca siro Nuh libanese,” *Parole de l’Orient* 30 (2005), pp. 383-409.

¹¹ J. LEROY, “Un témoignage inédit sur l’état du monastère des syriens au Wadi’n Natrun au début du XVI siècle” *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 65 (1967), pp. 1-23.

¹² Tamer EL-LEITY, *Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo 1293-1524*, Princeton University 2005 (PhD), chapter 9, p. 362.

¹³ Youhanna Nessim YOUSSEF, “Études d’hymnographie Copte: Nicodème et Sarkis”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 64 (1998), pp. 383-402. Mājid Šubḥī Rīzq, “Shakḥṣiyāt min ta’rīkhinā. II: al-Qumīš Irmīyā wa-Qīss”, *al-Karimah al-Jadīdah* 2 (2005), pp. 231-246.

3. Text and translation

In regards to our new unnamed female martyr, it seems she may have been of Egyptian origin, and her date of martyrdom is recorded in the Coptic calendar. The following text is very interesting because it is a rare example of Arabic texts relating to a female martyr.

على رروس المسلمين وتتجاهر به وقودا في شوارع المدينة وتنادي ان لا دين الا دين المسيح وبذلك تحتقر ديننا فافتحضاها القاض امامه وسالها عن ذلك فلم تجحد لكن ازدادت اعترافا فاراد تعنيفها فضربت منها شديدا بلا رحمة وكانوا يلتمسون منها الخروج من دينها والدخول في دينهم فجعلت تتكلم بنفي النبوة عن من لم يحل عليه روح الرب وتتزايد في اعلان ربوبية المسيح والهيته الحقيقية فلما لم ترجع عن رايها [...] فكتب ذلك القاضي قضيتها فانه بعلمه [...] هي مستوجبة الموت قتلا بالسيف اي نزع راسها ثم ارسل فاعلم الوالي بتلك المدينة فارسل السيف واهو ان من قبله وامر بالندا عليها بانها مستوجبة * الموت للعلة المقدم ذكرها فلما خرجت من مجلس الحكم كانت تتفاضل في الاعتراف بالحق ونفي الباطل وقد ايست من الحياة العاجلة الفانية وترجت الحياة الاجلة الباقية ولم يسرها وعد ولم يخيفها وعيد ولم تحب تنعم ولم تبغي انتقام ولكنها رفضت الفانيات الحقيرات وطلبت الديميات الجليلات ولما اودنوا اوليك من قتلها مع الذين حضروا بالغيرة السوا المرة للاشتراك في القتل مع توقد واضطرام نار الغضب واتمام الشهوة الخبيثة يزعمون ان بذلك ينالون الاجر تاما كما قال الانجيلي الرسول يوحنا حسب قول السيد المسيح هكذا لكن ستاتي ساعة يظن فيها كلم من يقتلكم انه يقرب قربانا

لله وانما يفعلون هذا لانهم لم يعرفوا الاب ولا انا ففي تلك الساعة ايسوا من حياتها وصارت عندهم*

كخروف سيق الى الذبح وكان بعضهم يضربها بالعصيان وبعضهم يرميها وبعضهم يسوقها باعساف وذلك السياف ينادي كما امر حتى كادوا يقتلوها في تلك الساعة رجما وضربا فلما انتهيا بها الى صحن القيامة المعظمة فترعوا من ارضة بلاطة وغرسوا مكانها خشبة وسمروا عليها تلك القديسة بمسامير حديدة في كفيها ثم اوقدوا نار في جسد تلك القديسة وهي بخلاف ما رسم لهم وتلك القديسة كانت تصرخ قايلة يا سيدي يسوع المسيح افتح لي بابك فاني ابنة اليك فلما عيها بذلك من كان يعذبها وبختهم قايلة يا بها الجهال اما تنظرون السما قد فتحت وكان قوم مسيحيون قيام عند الصليب تلك القديسة ليكون ويجزون عليها لما نالته من التعاذيب الشاقة*

طالبين من السيد المسيح معوتها وصبرها على احتمال الشدايد وثباتها في الايمان المستقيم لتنال الغلبة والظفر بالسعادة الابدية فيكون لهم بذلك فخرا بيننا ولما اشتدت عليها النار فانفك تسمير يديها من تلك الخشبة فمالت نحو باب القيامة المقدسة ونحو الشرق وتنيحت ونالت اكليل المجد بالشهادة والنياح الابدي في تاسع عشر شهر برمحات سنة الف ومائتي وتسعة وثمانين للشهداء الاطهار وكان ذلك السياف يقلب جسدها في النار بالالات مع تزايد اضطرام تلك النار تلك النار بقس لان يزدها حطبا حتى تمكن الحريق من جسد تلك القديسة وهو ميتة في رجا الحياة كما قال الانجيل المجيد امين اقول لكم ان حبة القمح ان لم تقع في الارض

“... and as she wandered] through the city streets, she cried out to the Muslims, declaring: ‘There is no religion other than the religion of Christ!’ thereby disdaining our religion.” So she was brought before the judge who questioned¹⁴ her actions. Yet, she did not deny her comments, but stood firm in her opinion. Wanting to rebuke her, he (the judge) ordered that she be beaten mercilessly. They [onlookers] begged her to submit to the Muslim religion, but she refused to submit to those who did not receive the Holy Spirit and all the more she continued declaring the Lordship and true divinity of Jesus Christ. And so she continued in her resolve [...]. The judge decreed that in his opinion [...] she deserved death by the sword, meaning she must be beheaded. So he sent his own swordsman to the governor of the city to declare his opinion on her case.

She [the saint] left the court rejoicing in her steadfast declaration of the truth and rejecting falsehood. She did not fear the terrible threats, but rather, she had no regard for the life that perishes, but instead looked forward to eternal life. She had no delight in revenge and refused temporal joy in search rather for eternal joy.

[On the day of her martyrdom] those who planned to participate in the killing, and those who came out of evil zeal, were gathered together and the fire of anger and hatred and revenge burned within them against her, according to what the Lord Jesus Christ said in the gospel of John the Evangelist: “But the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think and claim that he has offered sacrifice to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or Me.”¹⁵

She was led to them [her persecutors] as a lamb is led to the slaughter.¹⁶ Some beat her with sticks and others stoned her, while some whipped her with palm branches. As she came close to dying

¹⁴ Reading uncertain.

¹⁵ John 16:1-3.

¹⁶ Isaiah 53:7.

from all the blows she suffered, the swordsman cried out with the command for execution, according to the order he had received. They led her to the nave of the glorious (Church) of the Resurrection, and rather than carrying out the order [of the governor], they instead affixed her with iron nails to a cross and set her on fire. During this time the saint cried out: "My Lord Jesus Christ, open to me Your door, for I am Your daughter!" So when her persecutors reproached her for her words, she rebuked them saying: "O ignorant ones! Do not you see the heavens open?!"¹⁷ There were also Christian onlookers standing near the saint who was nailed to the cross, weeping because of the intensity of the tortures she was enduring, and beseeching Christ to help her and strengthen her to endure the hardships and remain steadfast in faith so that she may gain victory and eternal happiness and be a source of pride for them all.

When the fire became more intense, the nails fell from her hands that held her to the cross, and as her body fell forward in the east direction of the gate of the holy (Church) of Resurrection, she gave up her spirit in peace and attained the glorious crown of martyrdom. She went to her eternal rest on the 19th of Baramhāt in the year 1207 of the pure martyrs (1491 AD).

Meanwhile, the swordsman, keen to have her whole body consumed by the fire, fuelled the fire with straw and wood and, with instruments, continued rotating her body in the fire. For it is written in the gospel: "Amen. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth..."¹⁸

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¹⁷ Acts 7:56.

¹⁸ John 12:24



